

To experts, WWII pennies, nickels are small change

By Roger Boye

This week's column answers more questions about coins and currency.

Q—Are 1943 silver pennies special to collectors? Also, how rare are nickels made during the war?

—B.B., Elk Grove Village

A—In 1943, Uncle Sam minted more than one billion Lincoln cents out of steel coated with zinc [not silver] because the military needed all available copper supplies. The coins are common among hobbyists, most circulated specimens retailing for 15 cents to 50 cents each, depending on condition and mint mark.

Technicians also revised the metal content of most 5-cent coins issued from 1942 to 1945, using silver and manganese in place of the metal nickel. Worn "war nickels" are worth about 50 cents each today, based on the value of the nearly .06 ounce of silver in each piece.

Q—We want to sell our 1807 bust half dollar in "fine condition," but no one will pay us more than \$45. How can such an old, rare coin be worth so little? We were offered twice that amount for a 1914-D Lincoln cent, which is more common. Are dealers trying to cheat us?

—T.O., Chicago

A—You're a victim of the law of supply and demand. At least 100 hobbyists collect Lincoln cents for every person who specializes in early halves, experts say. Worn 1807 specimens simply are not hot sellers, despite the coin's low mintage [750,500] and its special spot in history [1807 was the first year for the capped bust design].

Q—Does the government still sell uncut sheets of \$1 bills? If so, how do we order them?

—P.W., Oak Park

A—Yes. Officials are offering uncut sheets of series 1981, or 1981-A bills, for \$9.50 for a four-note sheet, \$28 for 16 notes and \$47 for 32. To order, send a check to the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, Uncut Currency Sales Program, 14th and C Streets, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20228.

Q—In our "junk box" we found a small coin that says, "Confederate States" and "ten cents." Might the item be rare?

—A.G., Rantoul

A—No. It's a modern-day "fantasy coin" without value to collectors. The Confederacy issued \$2 billion or more worth of paper money but authorized production of just 16 coins—four half dollars and 12 one-cent pieces.

In 1861, workmen in New Orleans filed down the tails-side designs of four genuine United States half dollars and stamped in a Confederate inscription. A Philadelphia engraver made the pennies for the Confederacy, but he hid the coins and dies in his cellar, fearing that he would be arrested if he delivered them.